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Still from Kenneth Anger's *Lucifer Rising*, Part 1, 1974 (photo: Courtesy of the American Federation of Arts).

Identifying Anger

By Linda Dubler

The cinema is essentially the revealer of a whole occult life with which it puts us into direct contact. —Antonin Artaud

(Kenneth Anger was in residence at the Image Film and Video Center for two weeks at the beginning of February. Screenings of his ***Magick Lantern Cycle*** *films were standing room only.)*

Today he is not wearing the brilliant blue shirt emblazoned with the name "Anger" in a scarlet block-lettered diagonal that he seems to favor for public appearances. Today, he walks down the Strip in a tweed overcoat, carries a small leather attache case, and looks for all the world like he could be somebody's father. At the screening he suggested an interview over lunch; now Kenneth Anger, the director of *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and *Lucifer Rising* is escorting me into the Christian restaurant, an event which, I confess, was not part of my imagined scenario. Still, we are here because it is the cleanest place in the neighborhood. Mr. Anger's compulsive cleanliness has not escaped me—Anger, stooping to pick up a cigarette butt on the back stairs, retrieving the stray lid off take-out coffee left in the screening room, depositing it in the trash. I run through the unasked questions which I have recited to myself like a litany.

Remember, Kenneth Anger has said "There is a strain of violence in all of my films." Remember, this man chose to live and work with Bobby Beausoleil, the star of the first (uncompleted) *Lucifer Rising*, whose criminal activities expanded from the theft of Anger's footage for that film to committing one of the Manson-related murders. (Anger's first Lucifer, a four year old boy, died jumping off a roof; he thought he could fly). Remember too how, in Susan Sontag's essay "Fascinating Fascism" *Scorpio Rising* is cited, along with works by Mishima, Visconti, and Cavani as art that eroticizes Nazism. Remember *Scorpio* itself, its conjunction of men's bodies and machines as equally fine, glossy, hard, caressable objects.

Remember that Anger is the disciple of the notorious magus Aleister Crowley, proclaimer of the doctrine "Do what that wilt shall be the whole of the Law"; that he is a cinemagician whose work conjures, evokes, and invokes powerful, sometimes demonic forces. Remembering all of this, I can begin:

Q: Your work often seems rooted in violence. Do you see a point where the artifice of violence in art ceases to be art and becomes cruelty? I am thinking, for instance, of individuals involved in performances that center around acts of self mutilation.

A: I consider such acts completely sick, sheer pathology that should be stopped, if need be, by force. I was in London when Otto Muhl was doing a performance; members of the audience prevented him from killing a goose. The English are very uptight about any cruelty to animals. The authorities put him on a boat and sent him back to Vienna. The fact that his work was indulged as much as it was must have been a symptom of something really out of whack. To me, it brought to mind the kinds of experiments done in the concentration camps. Infliction of real wounds, cruelty to an animal or another person—it's absurd. I can put up with a lot of things, but not that. A lot of things pass for art because the times we live in are so morally chaotic.

Q: The sign Scorpio rules both sex and death, and your film, *Scorpio Rising*, looks at the conjunction of these two forces. You have characterized the film as the closest you've come to a documentary form. Still, the death that ends the film is a fiction. In what light do you consider films that actually unite sex and death—snuff films?

A: There is a big question about whether they even exist. No one that I know has ever seen one, and I tend to doubt their existence. The things that were in the papers were planted publicity by that terrible movie called *Snuff*, which in addition to being plain terrible, was terribly inept, a cheap Argentine thriller to which a few scenes were added that were obviously fake. It's interesting that such a thing even reached our public screens, that is the sociological curiosity. I don't think it should have. I believe in a certain amount of social decorum, and if you want to call it censorship, call it censorship. I don't think

that anything should go, and I don't believe that being over 21 makes much of a difference. Which doesn't mean that I want to set myself up as a censor. That would be ridiculous.

A lot of pornography strikes me as pathetic and sad. There's a certain percentage of the public that needs to *watch* things. An image doesn't love you back. It seems very cold. What can it give you; it's just a moving shadow.

Q: In the late 1950's you began to work on a version of the *Story of O*, which ended up being dropped. Given your feelings now, would you ever consider working on a similar project?

A: At the time when I approached the *Story of O* it was years before anything like that had been done and I saw it as an act of defiance. I shot 20 minutes of the script. I conceived of the film as a "fairytale for adults," and it was done in a very discrete style, very cool. No violence was ever shown, that was the big thing. Except for a little bruise or mark, all of the violence was implied. Since then we've had a so-called liberalizing of censorship codes, but I haven't seen any great works of art emerge as a result. We're still waiting for the Fragonard or the Jean Renoir, who can deal with sensuality in a way that is art.

The only comment that Anger made during the course of our conversation which met my expectations of him was made in relation to a statement by Carel Rowe, whose essay "Illuminating Lucifer" is quoted in the American Federation of Art's pamphlet that accompanies the Magick Lantern Cycle. Rowe writes: "(*Scorpio Rising*) reflects the last gasp of the dying Age of Pisces (Christianity) as a motorcycle race roaring toward oblivion... The skull and crossbones fluttering in superimposition over the cycle rally signifies the death of sensuality in much the same way as the death's head on the Masonic or Rosicrucian flags represents the philosophical death of man's sensuous personality." "Hot air," said Anger. "Astrologically, Scorpio being the sign of sex and death, the two things are intimately linked. Death is just as sensuous as love."

In the Tarot, the figure of the Magician has evolved out of the Juggler. The Magician represents transformation and the subsummation of opposites. Anger seems to do a lot of juggling of personalities. He is "not too pleased" about what has been written to date about his films. "It's very difficult for people to get a handle on them," he says, because "they are a visual experience which defies anecdotal description." It is equally difficult to get a handle on Anger. This is a man who, in speaking of the soundtrack for *Lucifer Rising*, which was composed by Bobby Beausoleil and the Freedom Orchestra in California's Tracy Prison, celebrates the therapeutic value of the undertaking—"It was better than rioting," and at the same time glows with the pride of possessing the only movie soundtrack composed by a group of 12 murderers. Watch *Invocation* carefully and you will see a black cat go up in flames.

The Magick Lantern Cycle, as Anger calls his complete body of work, includes *Fireworks* (1947), *Puce Moment* (1949), *Rabbit's Moon* (1950, revised 1978), *Eaux d'Artifice* (1953), *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), *Scorpio Rising* (1963), *Kustom Kar Kommandos,* (1965), *Invocation of My Demon Brother,* (1969), and *Lucifer Rising, Part 1* (1974). The Cycle adds up to less than three hours of film, and represents 33 years of work as a public artist. (Anger actually began making movies at age 11.)

If one conceives of the Cycle as a great circle, the films can be understood as situated at different stations around the circumference, offering different moments and aspects of a set of centrally contained concerns. Within the circle live the Crowleyan practice of Magick (Crowley's preferred spelling for the term "the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the will"), Anger's "fire/light trip," and the principle of transformation. The circle, that is the Cycle, like a magic circle, is Anger's tool for "casting a glamour," "exerting an enchantment which works not on the conscious logic, but on a deeper level."

Anger's films, always visually rich, have become progressively more complex in both images and levels of meaning as he has become more involved in the practice of Magick. All of the films, but especially *Inauguration, Invocation,* and *Lucifer,* benefit from multiple viewings. Reading about this work can make it more accessible. P. Adams Sitney's bible of the American avant-garde *Visionary Film,* and Tony Raynes' essay "Lucifer, A Kenneth Anger Kompendium" (*Cinema #4*, Britain) are the definitive writings to date.

Kenneth Anger in Atlanta's Fox Theatre (photo: Gerald Jones).

In Anger's films the subject of the work, the approach to the work, and the effect of the work are united. The magick in the film relates to the magickal effect upon the audience. The ever present theme of transformation is demonstrated in the fact that Anger has, over the years, continued to alter and revise the Magick Lantern Cycle. Anger's films exist in a constant state of transition, reflecting in part his extreme perfectionism—"I'm caring all the time," in part a characteristic Luciferian predilection for change.

Anger calls the current *Rabbit's Moon* his "kiddie version." It has been step printed to increase the pace, zooms have been removed, and the Temptations' soundtrack has been replaced by the music of Andy Arthur. For a special program of complete works in the Spring Equinox of 1966 he hand-tinted the candle atop the Christmas tree and scratched out the face of the man in bed beside the dreamer in *Fireworks*. There have been at least four versions of *Inauguration:* the first was edited to a soundtrack by Harry Partch; the version distributed during the late '50s and up to 1966 had Janacek's Glagolithic Mass for a soundtrack. Then, for the Second Experimental Film Festival, held at the Brussel's World's Fair of 1958, he made a version with three screen synchronous projection for the climactic final two-thirds of its 40 minutes. In 1966 he issued the Sacred Mushroom version, which I believe is the one currently in distribution. P. Adams Sitney describes the changes in this version: "superimposition, sometimes many layers deep, replaced the earlier linear development and montage. To the multiplication of his characters he added shots from Harry Lachman's *Dante's Inferno*, mainly crowd scenes of burning, printed in red, and most of *Puce Moment*." Sitney's description mentions the soundtrack as being sounds of screaming mixed with the Janacek composition, though the film is now shown with a track by the Electric Light Orchestra. *Scorpio Rising* has been altered by the addition of painted scorpio talismans that appear in zooming superimpositions several times. *Invocation* went through two unshown versions prior to release, and I cannot say how many changes since. A still from the film which accompanies Rowe's piece, depicting Anger descending a flight of stairs, is not included in the version presently shown. Finally, *Lucifer Rising,* Part I no longer features the music composed by Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, and, like *Invocation,* must have been subject to re-editing since Rowe's article appeared; she describes "the sorcerer's movements as he widdershins around a magic circle intercut with an exterior long shot of a baby gorilla and a tiger cub chasing around the base of a tree," but this sequence is nowhere to be seen.

Anger seems to take pleasure in making fugitive art. Imagine trying to discuss one of these films with someone who had seen it years, or even months before. The critical approach is equally problematic, since analysis demands at the very least the fixed identity of the work analyzed. At moments the situation confronted seems impossibly elusive. The Trickster, the mischievous aspect of Lucifer, is at work.

The fact that Anger's films are always changing does not prevent audiences from probing them for meaning. They invite interpretation, evoking what Patti Smith calls the "sea of possibilities." A film like *Lucifer Rising* obviously holds levels of meaning beyond the immediately perceived striking beauty of its imagery. Like the Tarot, to which Anger pays a great deal of attention, *Lucifer* exerts its initial fascination through individual archetypal images resplendent with gorgeous symbolism. Penetrating the surface of the images, one discovers a constellation of correspondences. Finally, the images and their associations, like the Tarot trumps, must be understood in their relationship to each other.

A Demonstration, being a construction of a reading of (only) one sequence of Lucifer Rising.

The Sequence: The Adept awakens. Clad in a long, multicolored garment, he rises from a bed covered by a satin spread bearing the sign of the Unicursal Hexagram. He crosses the room and takes from a chest a wand wrapped in cloth, glancing at a Tibetan painting of a sage or saint, whose eye is seen in close-up. A journey through a red corridor leads him into a temple-like space, wherein he touches the wand to a black statue of a hawk. The Adept then approaches the draped throne in the center of the room, snatches off its covering, and is seated. His robes have been replaced by a length of red cloth which drapes his naked body, and instead of a wand he holds a javelin. He casts the javelin, and in a fast montage sequence it strikes a woman in a sunny, outdoor space. The montage also includes images of knives and swords, and a red faceted jewel. In the following shot the Adept is shown still seated on the throne, his body covered in blood, a wound in his chest. He rises and walks naked to a tub of water, in which he submerges himself. The mirrored wall of the room is decorated with the words Bass and Co. Pale Ale and a red triangle marked with the inscription "trade-mark."

The Reading: The transition of the Fool (Card 0 of the Tarot), whose attributes are uncontrolled inspiration and madness, into the Magician (Card 1), the mediator between heaven and earth, the messenger and ruler of dreams and the imagination, through a ceremony of Mars.

Accomplishing the Reading: The Adept's multicolored coat identifies him with the Fool. This identification is reinforced by the Bass Ale signature, which falls into Anger's category of "magickal marks on the wall" (glyphs, heiroglyph, sigals, pictograms, billboards and tatoos) and indicates the presence of Dionysis. Dionysis, in Crowley's *Book of Thoth,* the Egyptian Tarot, is integrated into the persona of the Fool.

After crossing the room and choosing the wand, the Adept acknowledges the Tibetan sage's eye, drawn in a fashion which bears a striking resemblance to the eye of Horus, the Egyptian God of Light. Since Lucifer was worshiped by the Romans as Aurora (the morning star) and Vesper (the evening star) and by the Gnostics as the Herald of the Dawn, the light preceding the Sun, Horus can be viewed as another incarnation of Lucifer. The subsequent journey through the red corridor announces the dominant influence of Mars, the warrior, whose color is red. Again saluting Lucifer, the black hawk statue of Horus, the Adept performs the ceremony of Mars, intended to evoke a demonic force against an enemy. The red cloth draping the Adept's body, the iron weapons and the red jewel are all elements utilized in this ritual. However, the enemy at whom the destructive force is directed seems to be an aspect of the Adept himself, his female anima, for although a woman falls, he is marked with the wound.

The bath signals a baptism into the new identity of the Magician the pivotal figure in the film. The magician's planet is Mercury and his symbol is the active geometry of the triangle. Mercury, along with ruling messages and dreams, rules trade. The triangular trade-mark which figures as part of the Bass and Co. insignia is a complex sign, referring to Mercury, to the

Stills from Kenneth Anger's *Magick Lantern Cycle* films. Above, from *Rabbit's Moon,* 1950, revised 1978; below, from *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome,* 1954 (phone: Courtesy of the American Federation of Arts).

Magician, and perhaps to the magickal trade practiced by Kenneth Anger, the making of films. The Magician in *Lucifer Rising* is the channel through which the natural energy summoned by the gods Isis and Osiris flows. It is his spinning invocation which, focusing the power of the sea, calls Lucifer into being. Appropriately, the invocation concludes with the figure of the Magician whirling inside a triangle, a triangle matted in a dark screen alive with flying charges of energy.

The risk involved in making this reading is that of duplicating Pierrot's folly in *Rabbit's Moon*—reaching for the moon, for that which is always out of reach, out of frame. Two pieces of objective evidence: Leslie Huggins, the Lucifer of Part I, was discovered by Anger at an English iron works; when planning the original *Lucifer Rising* in 1966, Anger envisioned a tableau of living Tarot cards.

Anger sees himself as an insular artist, one who identifies with no movement or group. "The energy I have today in film work is what I've always derived from myself. I'm consumed with my own work as a filmmaker." He would love to work in 70mm but is grateful to be working in 16mm. Now he continues the labor of completing *Lucifer Rising*, a project to which he devoted his attention during most of the '70s. What we have seen is the first episode of a trilogy. Three is the number of completeness, creation, potency, multiplicity. The Princess was given three wishes, the Magician a spell to recite three times. Kenneth Anger promises us *Lucifer Rising*.

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The Southern Woman Artist

By Sandra L. Langer & K.M. McClure

At first glance, the phrases "woman artist" and "southern woman artist" seem to differ only by the addition of the adjective "southern." This single modifier, however, might be seen as an indication that significant contrasts exist between the consciousness and the needs of these two groups. Although ultimately a more fruitful comparison might be suggested by the term "regional," for the purposes of this discussion some distinctive characteristics of the American South will be briefly examined as they affect women artists working in the region. Our intention here is not to provide an exhaustive treatment of these characteristics, but rather to sketch a few peculiarities of the southern experience in the hope of suggesting some useful distinctions for further study.

A major consideration in any discussion of the southern context is that the south itself is far from a homogeneous entity. Many of the same factors which identify the South as a distinct region from the rest of the nation also serve to differentiate various subregions within the south. Social scientists, for example, often separate the Deep South (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana) from the Rim South (Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and Texas, and sometimes Arkansas and others) on the basis of various historical, socio-cultural, and economic indicators. The most important of these discussion of southern artists would be the degree of urbanization and the possible consequent differences in experience and perception between southern practitioners and their non-southern counterparts. At the same time, the cultural and institutional infrastructure of the South seems to be significantly different from that of the "mainstream" art centers of Los Angeles and New York. Finally, there is the tendency to equate the national art establishment (mainstream and feminist) with the simple application of the pejorative "provincial." Finally, although these conditions impinge equally upon all southern artists, male and female alike, another factor particularly affecting southern women artists might be identified as the persistence of the image of the southern lady as a potentially powerful deterrent to the development of feminist consciousness among southern women in general.

For living artists, one of the biggest problems in the South is the minimal level of support and funding for contemporary art. This is a mutually shared problem for most artists in the region, and we would suspect that this is so in other less urban areas of the nation as well. Even relatively large southern urban centers such as Richmond, New Orleans, Mobile, Jacksonville, Miami, and Atlanta cannot compare with the established art centers in terms of financial and institutional resources devoted to the visual arts. There are few museums, even less funding, a paucity of contemporary galleries, and a general dearth of quality exhibitions. Where it is possible for established institutions such as the Whitney and MOMA to exclude women from their major exhibits, the same cannot generally be said of the many small and often impoverished southern institutions which are just barely surviving. Given these conditions and the dominance of mainstream centers, it matters little whether women are included in local/regional shows or not, for they receive scant national attention for their prowess in any case. In this sense, equally ignored, southern artists, male and female, share many of the same problems and often band together for the mutual survival of all concerned.

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